

The American Embassy Newsletter

July 31, 2008, Volume 6, Issue 2

Embassy of the United States of America to Lithuania

Special Features:

Message from Ambassador John Cloud

Consular Information:

Tips for Travel Abroad

U.S. November Elections

Lithuanian Permanent
Residency Exam

Avian Flu Update

Upcoming Seimas Elections

Personal Safety Tips

Holiday Closures

Message from Ambassador John Cloud

I hope everyone is having a safe and happy summer. July 28th marked the 86th anniversary of U.S.-Lithuanian diplomatic relations. The United States can continue to be proud that we never recognized the Soviet Union's occupation of Lithuania.

I had the honor of accompanying Prime Minister Kirkilas on his visit to Washington in early July. In the Administration, the Prime Minister met with Vice President Cheney, Secretary of State Rice, and Secretary of Defense Gates. He also had meetings with the Lithuanian-American community and the U.S. Jewish community in New York. It was a very successful visit and further developed the close alliance relationship that the United States has with

Lithuania.

I returned to Vilnius just in time to host the annual July 4th reception. My apologies to the American Chamber of Commerce that I missed their event on July 3 because of missed plane connections. Embassy officials and other Americans told me it was a wonderful event.

One of the key issues we will be focused on this fall will be the Seimas' review of proposed Presidential amendments to Lithuania's residency law. The Embassy understands that the requirement that temporary workers be in Lithuania for two years before their non-EU families can join them creates real harm to Americans working in Lithuania. We have explained our concerns to several members of the Seimas and will continue to do so as the Seimas considers these amendments.







I want to welcome a number of new employees to our Embassy family. Michele Collins is our new Regional Security Officer, LTC David Millner is our new Defense Attache, and Brad Norton is our new Consul.

We have tentatively scheduled our next Town Hall meeting for Saturday, September 20, 2008 in the American Center. I hope to see you then.

Ambassador John Cloud

Have a Great Summer: Tips for Safe Travel Abroad

With the summer travel season in full swing, the Consular Section would like to provide a few quick tips for safe travel. More detailed information about steps you can take to ensure a safe trip is available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at travel.state.gov. Here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer.

-  **Register so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:** Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.
-  **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport. If you need a new passport, the Consular Section can assist you at anytime during American Citizen Services hours. Please note that while Lithuania participates in the Schengen zone, local officials have the authority to request passport checks at any time. We recommend that American citizens carry their passport during any travel, even if it is within the Schengen zone.
-  **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page, and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
-  **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.
-  **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.
-  **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear

Please encourage any American Citizens living in Lithuania to register with the Consular Section. They can register online at <http://travelregistration.state.gov>

conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

- ✚ **Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency medical assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.

Summer Reading

The State Department has started a new program to disseminate news articles of interest to Americans abroad. The articles below are a selection of publications concerning safe travel that are informative and memorable, and appeal to a wide audience. Enjoy!

- ✓ "Foreign Roads Can Be Dangerous to U.S. Drivers"
www.usatoday.com/travel/news/2007-08-13-tourist-deaths_N.htm
- ✓ "Surgery and Sightseeing, in One Trip"
articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/21/business/fi-sunprofile21
- ✓ "Go Beyond Copies of Your Passport Docs and Medical Records"
www.smartertravel.com/travel-advice/go-beyond-copies-of-your-passport-docs-and-medical-records.html?id=2517885

Make Your Vote Count: Nationwide Voting Deadlines

The U.S. general election will be held on Tuesday, November 4. The chart below lists the deadlines for registering to vote, requesting a ballot, and returning the ballot.*

Please remember, the Consular Section is always available to provide voting assistance.

	<u>Registration</u>	<u>Ballot Request</u>	<u>Ballot Return</u>
Alabama	October 24	October 30	November 4
Alaska	October 5	October 25	November 19
American Samoa	October 6	August 20	November 4
Arizona	November 4	November 4	November 4
Arkansas	n/a	October 28	November 14
California	October 20	October 28	November 4
Colorado	October 6	October 31	November 4
Connecticut	November 3	November 3	November 4
Delaware	October 20	October 31	November 4
District of Columbia	October 6	October 27	November 14
Florida	October 6	October 29	November 14
Georgia	October 6	October 31	November 7
Guam	October 24	October 31	November 4
Hawaii	October 6	October 28	November 4
Idaho	October 10	October 29	November 4
Illinois	October 4	October 25	November 18
Indiana	October 6	October 27	November 4
Iowa	n/a	n/a	November 10
Kansas	waived	October 31	November 4
Kentucky	October 6	October 28	November 4
Louisiana	October 6	November 3	November 4
Maine	November 4	November 4	November 4
Maryland	October 14	October 28	November 14
Massachusetts	waived	November 3	November 4
Michigan	November 4	November 4	November 4
Minnesota	none	November 3	November 4
Mississippi	October 5	October 5	November 3
Missouri	October 8	October 29	November 4
Montana	October 6	November 3	November 4
Nebraska	October 17	October 29	November 4
Nevada	October 4	October 28	November 4
New Hampshire	November 3	November 3	November 4
New Jersey	October 31	October 31	November 4
New Mexico	waived	October 31	November 4

New York	October 10	October 28	November 11
North Carolina	November 3	November 3	November 4
North Dakota	n/a	September 25	November 7
Ohio	October 6	November 1	November 14
Oklahoma	not required	October 29	November 4
Oregon	October 14	October 30	November 4
Pennsylvania	October 6	November 4	November 3
Puerto Rico	September 4	September 4	November 4
Rhode Island	October 4	October 14	November 4
South Carolina	October 4	October 31	November 4
South Dakota	October 20	November 4	November 4
Tennessee	October 5	October 28	November 4
Texas	October 6	October 28	November 10
Utah	October 15	October 15	November 18
Vermont	October 29	November 3	November 4
Virgin Islands	October 5	October 14	November 14
Virginia	October 6	October 28	November 4
Washington	November 4	November 4	November 25
West Virginia	October 14	October 29	hour of canvass
Wisconsin	October 15	October 30	November 4
Wyoming	October 6	November 3	November 4

** Some restrictions apply. Please contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy or the Federal Voting Assistance Program website (www.fvap.gov) for more information.*

Permanent Residency: Lithuanian Language and Constitution Tests

The following information was provided by an American living in Lithuania, who recently completed the Lithuanian language and constitutional knowledge examinations to apply for permanent residency:

My wife and I took the tests in March. We both passed and will now be applying for the permanent living permits.

Language Test:

There is a book for sale in bookstores named "PASIRENK EGZAMINAMS PATS!" that shows you the layout of the language test. I think this book costs around twenty litas. There are three different language tests depending on the person taking the test, and why he is taking the test. For missionaries, like me, they are required to pass the first level (the easiest). This would probably cover most Americans. The other two levels are for professional people who need, because of their profession, to be able to communicate at a certain required level. The 1st level of the test is covered in the above book from pages 12 - 40. There is also a section on the Constitution test from pages 103 - 107 in the same book.

The test, which was broken into various categories, went from 12:00 - 4:00. Each category had a specific time limit. The categories were:

- (1) Reading and writing,
- (2) Listening to various dialogues played on a CD and answering questions from the dialogues,
- (3) Reading a short story and answering questions about the story,
- (4) Reading a story and choosing the right word to go into various blank spaces (they give you a word with three different case endings to choose from),
- (5) Reading a text and filling in the blanks with the right prepositions, pronouns, etc.
- (6) Filling out a form,
- (7) Writing an advertisement,
- (8) Speaking to a Lithuanian language board about a selected subject for 5 - 10 minutes.

In order to pass the language test you must:

- (1) Be able to read Lithuanian,
- (2) Have a basic understanding of conversational language,
- (3) Have a basic understanding of grammar and word ending changes,
- (4) Be able to speak on a variety of subjects.

Constitution test:

This test really stunned us! I have been speaking Lithuanian now for 10 years and there were some words in the constitution test that I have never heard before.

There are twenty multiple choice questions. Each question has three choices. Some of them are very obvious, but some were very tricky and there seemed to be more than one right answer. You have to get at least fourteen right out of twenty in order to pass.

I would recommend for anyone having to take this test to go on-line and print out the Lithuanian constitution in English, study it first, and then study the Constitution in Lithuanian to find the words you do not understand.

This is not an easy test - prepare for it!

Again, examples of both tests are in the above mentioned book. For anyone taking these tests, I would highly recommend buying this book so you know exactly what the test will look like and what to expect. The tests we took were exactly like the examples in the book - just different questions and scenarios.

Avian Influenza Update

Avian influenza, or “bird flu,” has been in the news during the last several years. While the latest World Health Organization report does not show any confirmed human cases in our immediate neighborhood, avian influenza has been discovered in poultry and birds within our region.

It is only prudent to be ready for the possibility that we may face avian influenza or another pandemic flu here. The Department of State compiled the following guidance for preparing to deal with potential outbreaks anywhere in the world.

How to prepare for "Sheltering in Place"

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) virus among animals in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe has the potential to significantly threaten human health. If a virus such as H5N1 mutates and spreads easily from one person to another, avian influenza may break out globally. While there are **no reports of sustained human-to-human transmission** of avian influenza, the U.S. government and international health agencies are preparing for a possible pandemic.

Private American citizens should be aware that it may not be possible to travel during an outbreak. Governments may close borders suddenly and without advance warning. Depending on the severity of a pandemic, commercial airlines might drastically curtail or even cease operations. Travel restrictions could also impede people from returning to the United States or fleeing to other countries. For these reasons, Americans who are overseas during a pandemic may need to “shelter-in-place” (i.e., stay home and practice “social distancing” to avoid contagion) for an appropriate period of time.

American Citizens Abroad: Due to varying conditions overseas, Americans abroad should evaluate their situation and prepare emergency supplies accordingly (non-perishable food, potable water, medicines, etc.) for the possibility of sheltering-in-place for at least two and up to twelve weeks. Water purification techniques such as boiling, filtering and/or adding chlorine to locally available water may replace the need to store large quantities of water.

What can you do on a daily basis? Cover your cough. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or apply a hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol content. Stay home if you are sick. Vaccinate yourself against seasonal flu.

Travel: American citizens living in or traveling to countries with human or animal cases of H5N1 virus should consider the potential risks. Keep informed of the latest medical guidance and practical information and plan accordingly. Consult www.travel.state.gov for the latest tips on international travel.

On-Line Resources: Detailed information about suggested preparations, as well as planning checklists, are available on the U.S. government's one-stop web site on pandemic influenza (www.pandemicflu.gov), also the World Health Organization (www.who.int/en/) and the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) websites.

Update from the Political-Economic Section

Elections 2008: LITHUANIA!

2008 is an important year for elections – in Lithuania as well as in America. For those of us living in Lithuania, the multitude of political parties often make politics here seem more complicated than in our own system. Here is a short primer on the election process for Lithuania's Parliamentary elections, which will take place on October 12 this year.

The Lithuanian Parliament is called the Seimas. It has 141 members, who are elected every four years – or more frequently if the Seimas or President call for early elections. Seventy-one Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected directly, in single mandate districts – similar to Congressional districts in the United States. The other seventy are elected through the proportion of a nation-wide vote that a party wins based on party lists. To win seats in the Seimas through the party list, a party has to win at least five percent of the overall vote. There are 38 political parties registered in Lithuania, about 20 of them will have candidates in the elections. About ten or twelve of those will win at least one seat in the Seimas.

The first round of elections will take place on October 12. On that day, the seventy winners from party lists will be determined as will those from single mandate district candidates who receive more than fifty percent of the vote. Other single mandate districts will have a run-off election between the two top vote-getters on October 26. In 2004, the most recent Seimas election, only five single mandate districts did not need a run-off election. Even after the run off, however, there will be a lot of negotiations before a new Government can be formed.

No single party is expected to win a majority of seats in the Seimas. Therefore, in order to form a new Government – including selecting a new Prime Minister and Cabinet of Ministers – there will have to be some sort of coalition. The coalition has to win the support of a majority of Seimas members, 71 out of the total 141, to establish its new Government. Usually, this means getting several parties to agree to work together. Each party in the coalition receives some key positions in the Government – Minister, Vice Minister, Prime Minister – and some key positions in the Seimas – Speaker, Vice Speaker, heads of Committees.

Most political commentators predict that the elections, as well as the coalition formation process, will be complicated.

News from the Regional Security Office

How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Crime

While Lithuania is, by and large, a safe place, several dangers are worth mentioning to American residents (especially new arrivals).

Thefts and robberies are a persistent problem in Lithuania. This includes car theft, burglary of belongings in cars, and even home burglaries. As a rule, people living in Lithuania should not exit their car with the keys still in the ignition, regardless of circumstances. Additionally, people should obey common sense and never leave valuables in plain sight inside a car. Home burglaries have been reported, so residents should always lock their doors and windows while not at home. Furthermore, leaving garage doors open at any time, even while home, leaves your belongings unprotected and vulnerable to theft. Always remember that cars and homes of foreign nationals are especially tempting targets for thieves.

Personal security is also important to keep in mind while residing in Lithuania. Pick pocketing does occur (though not as bad as some other places in Europe), so people should pay close attention to their belongings on public transportation and in crowded markets or other areas. Also, ostentatious displays of wealth should be minimized. Consume alcohol in moderation, as intoxicated people (especially foreigners) are easy marks for criminals. Unfortunately, as in many parts of Eastern Europe, non-Caucasian foreigners are often subject to racially motivated verbal, and sometimes physical, harassment. Travelers and residents are both encouraged to obey common sense in Lithuania.

Avoiding potentially dangerous places and situations should mitigate most of these threats. Take the extra second to close that garage door, secure valuables in a safe place, or avoid poorly-lit streets, and you can sidestep security-related problems.

Next American Citizen Town Hall Meeting – September 20, 2008

Holiday Closures at the Embassy:

- ☞ August 15 – Assumption Day (Lithuania)
- ☞ September 1 – Labor Day (U.S.)
- ☞ October 13 – Columbus Day (U.S.)
- ☞ November 3 – All Saints' Day (Lithuania)
- ☞ November 11 – Veteran's Day (U.S.)
- ☞ November 27 – Thanksgiving Day (U.S.)